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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AM](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: SAAKASHVILI SEEKS UNAMBIGUOUS SUPPORT  
FROM NEW ADMINISTRATION

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In a wide-ranging discussion, President Saakashvili and EUR DAS Matt Bryza discussed regional developments, U.S. assistance for Georgia and next steps on the Geneva process. The President shared his views on opposition politicians and the planned April 9 protests. President Saakashvili urged the United States to express unambiguous support for Georgia and to send senior visitors quickly. DAS Bryza promised to coordinate closely on regional issues and to consider carefully Georgia's requests on the remainder of the 1 billion USD pledge to Georgia. The two also discussed the importance of returning Armenian church properties in Georgia to the Church of Armenia. End Summary.

#### Regional Review

¶2. (C) The President said that Georgia needed internal stability and the unambiguous support of the United States. He encouraged DAS Bryza to encourage other senior U.S. officials to visit Georgia and to make public statements of support. He hoped the Vice President might visit soon. Specifically on regional issues, Saakashvili asked DAS Bryza whether the Turks had expressed concerns about U.S. access to Trabzon. Saakashvili believed that a reduction in U.S. forces in Iraq would create a new opportunity for U.S.-Turkish relations. DAS Bryza told Saakashvili that during his recent trip to Turkey, MFA Under Secretary Apakan asked Bryza to inquire whether Georgia might agree to a civilian shipping link between Trabzon and Sukhumi as a way to reinforce support for Georgia's territorial integrity by allowing members of Turkey's Abkhaz Diaspora to enter Abkhazia directly from Turkey rather than via Russia. President Saakashvili said he was not interested in this option, as it would gain nothing for Georgia while providing gains for Abkhazia. That said, Saakashvili did express interest in increasing business and people-to-people ties between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. Bryza added that in Turkey, he had been asked about issues related to a potential Armenia genocide resolution in the U.S. Congress and how such a resolution would affect the emerging relationship between Ankara and Yerevan, and that the highest levels of the Administration were exploring ways to jump-start the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. Saakashvili asked whether Bryza thought the Nabucco project could work if Iranian gas was included, to which Bryza replied that Iranian gas was not needed, especially as Iran did not have enough gas to supply internal markets in Tehran and Tabriz. DAS Bryza and Saakashvili agreed that the White Stream project and/or Black Sea liquid natural gas (from Georgia to Romania) could potentially be used to help motivate the Turkish side to move more quickly on Nabucco.

#### U.S. Assistance

¶3. (C) President Saakashvili told Bryza that his main focus

was Georgia's economy and asked about the remainder of the 1 billion USD assistance package. He said that U.S. assistance was important for survivability, not just sustainability. Saakashvili said that it was critical to spend money in Georgia -- he believed a crisis could be looming as early as fall 2009 when the government might possibly be unable to pay salaries. DAS Bryza told Saakashvili that he believed Washington could not support further direct budget support, but that he hoped the President agreed with current proposals for funding including a road project and IDP housing. Qfor funding including a road project and IDP housing. Saakashvili inquired whether the funding would come through USAID and Bryza responded that some of it would. Bryza also said the United States would consider a proposal from the Prime Minister to solicit European allies on possibly providing a \$250 million line of credit to sustain confidence in Georgia's banking system, which had weathered the August war and the global financial crisis, but was under stress. Bryza pledged to follow up with the "New Friends of Georgia" foreign ministers the next evening in Brussels.

#### Next Steps on Conflicts

14. (C) DAS Bryza told the President he saw two immediate issues as next steps: first, it appeared Russia would not allow renewal of the OSCE mandate in Georgia according to any "status-neutral" proposal, and that if this indeed were to be the case, Russia's obstructionism should be seen as responsible for the breakdown. Georgia would then garner greater diplomatic capital, which would be useful in negotiating a new mandate for UNOMIG. Second, for UNOMIG, it was critical that the next mandate maintain a single mission for all of Georgia (rather than one mission in Abkhazia and a

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second mission in the rest of Georgia). Bryza told Saakashvili there needed to be another meeting of the Geneva Process in coming weeks to provide time to negotiate the UNSC resolution renewing the UNOMIG mandate long before its expiration on June 15. DAS Bryza's view was that Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Giga Bokeria had built up a store of credibility and goodwill with his flexibility and constructiveness during recent Geneva talks. According to Bryza, the Europeans were privately furious with Russian and separatist obstructionism in Geneva. If the Russians would not be willing to meet formally before UNOMIG renewal, we should consider some other format which could expose the fact that Russia's true intention was not to facilitate discussion and improve security on the ground, but rather to continue to create divisions and destabilize Georgia.

#### The Opposition

15. (C) President Saakashvili said that Irakli Alasania was not doing well in the polls. According to the President, Alasania has been saying that he recently met with Secretary Clinton and EU Representative Solana (note: Post is unaware of any meeting with the Secretary. End note). Saakashvili urged Bryza to use his meetings with opposition leaders (septel) to discourage violence. He told the DAS that the Russians want to see violence on the streets of Tbilisi, which was why they were supporting former Speaker of Parliament Nino Burjanadze (reftel A). The President said that Burjanadze had a "zero percent chance" of winning at the polls and was therefore trying to take her case to the street.

16. (C) Saakashvili described leader of the Christian Democrats (CDM) Giorgi Targamadze as smart because he was occupying an empty space in Georgian politics -- between the government and the radicals. He said that Targamadze was focused on 2010 municipal elections, which will in turn provide a platform for future elections. The president said that most of the non-parliamentary politicians believed that the municipal elections were below them -- he speculated that Alasania would not waste his time on such an insignificant

first step -- everyone wanted to launch straight to the presidency. He believed for Alasania to have success he would need to move towards this more moderate space. Saakashvili said that Alasania had jumped into the opposition prematurely and that his alliance with David Gamkrelidze and David Usupashvili, old opposition faces, had diminished his stature. He warned that rhetoric regarding April 9, particularly from Burjanadze, was already starting to take an aggressive tone. She had reportedly called for demonstrators to take control of government buildings. Bryza pledged to continue working with Alasania to maintain his focus on Georgia's need for patience and unity, and to prepare himself for a run at the presidency in due course.

17. (C) Bryza reminded President Saakashvili of the importance the U.S. places on the return of Armenian church properties to the Church of Armenia. Bryza noted he had discussed this matter earlier in the day with Georgian Patriarch Ilya, and that the process needed a nudge. President Saakashvili readily agreed on the need to keep working this issue.

TEFFT